

Morality and Abstract Thinking

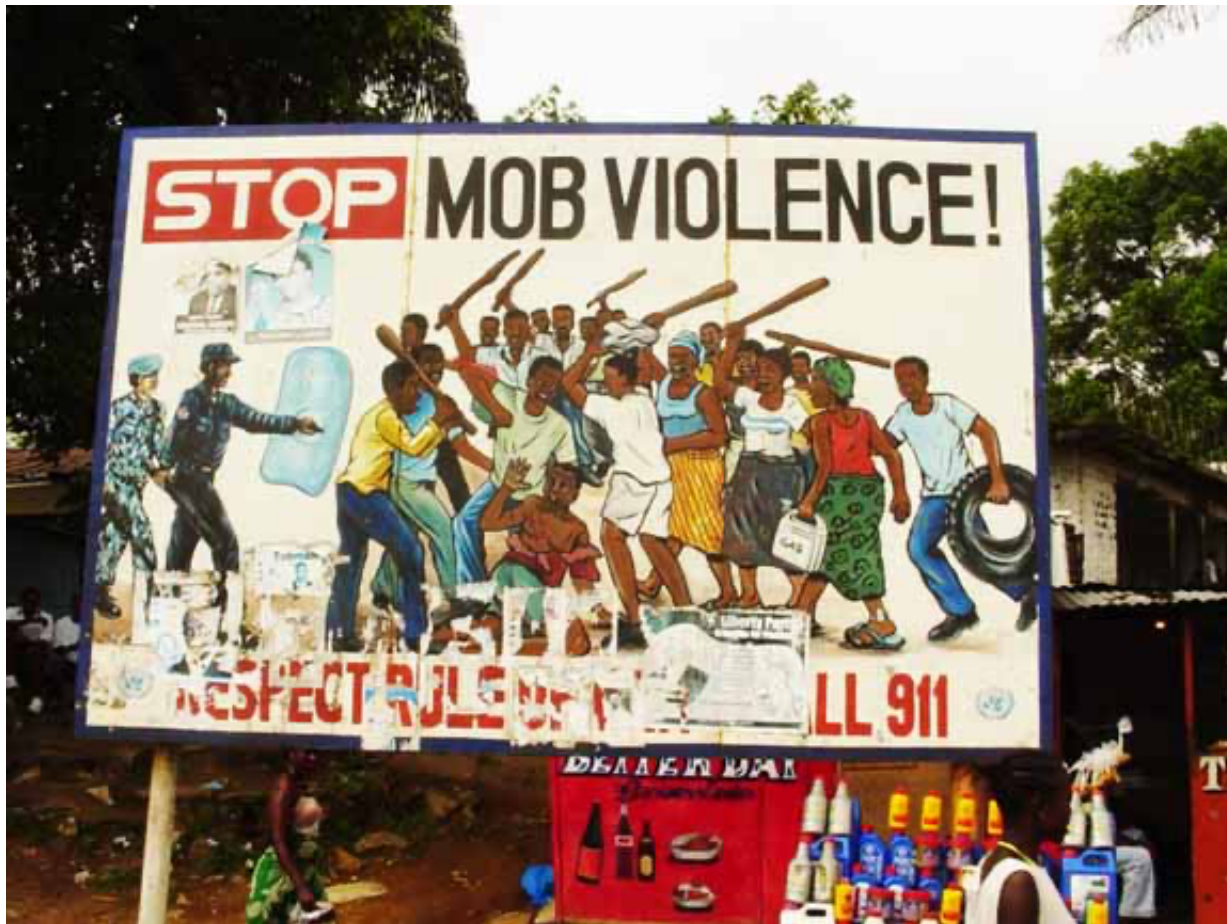
How Africans may differ from Westerners

by Gedaliah Braun

I am an American who taught philosophy in several African universities from 1976 to 1988, and have lived since that time in South Africa. When I first came to Africa, I knew virtually nothing about the continent or its people, but I began learning quickly. I noticed, for example, that Africans rarely kept promises and saw no need to apologize when they broke them. It was as if they were unaware they had done anything that called for an apology.

It took many years for me to understand why Africans behaved this way but I think I can now explain this and other behavior that characterizes Africa. I believe that morality requires abstract thinking—as does planning for the future—and that a relative deficiency in abstract thinking may explain many things that are typically African.

What follow are not scientific findings. There could be alternative explanations for what I have observed, but my conclusions are drawn from more than 30 years of living among Africans.



A public service billboard in South Africa. Note old tire and gas can. My first inklings about what may be a deficiency in abstract thinking came from what I began to learn about African languages. In a conversation with students in Nigeria I asked how you would say that a coconut is about halfway up the tree in their local language. “You can’t say that,” they explained. “All you can say is that it is ‘up’.” “How about right at the top?” “Nope; just ‘up’.” In other words, there appeared to be no way to express gradations.

A few years later, in Nairobi, I learned something else about African languages when two women expressed surprise at my English dictionary. “Isn’t English your language?” they asked. “Yes,” I said. “It’s my only language.” “Then why do you need a dictionary?”

They were puzzled that I needed a dictionary, and I was puzzled by their puzzlement. I explained that there are times when you hear a word you’re not sure about and so you look it up. “But if English is your language,” they asked, “how can there be words you don’t know?” “What?” I said. “No one knows all the words of his language.”

I have concluded that a relative deficiency in abstract thinking may explain many things that are typically African. “But we know all

the words of Kikuyu; every Kikuyu does,” they replied. I was even more surprised, but gradually it dawned on me that since their language is entirely oral, it exists only in the minds of Kikuyu speakers. Since there is a limit to what the human brain can retain, the overall size of the language remains more or less constant. A written language, on the other hand, existing as it does partly in the millions of pages of the written word, grows far beyond the capacity of anyone to know it in its entirety. But if the size of a language is limited, it follows that the number of concepts it contains will also be limited and hence that both language and thinking will be impoverished.

African languages were, of necessity, sufficient in their pre-colonial context. They are impoverished only by contrast to Western languages and in an Africa trying to emulate the West. While numerous dictionaries have been compiled between Euro*pean and African languages, there are few dictionaries within a single African language, precisely because native speakers have no need for them. I did find a Zulu-Zulu dictionary, but it was a small-format paperback of 252 pages.

My queries into Zulu began when I rang the African Language Department at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and spoke to a white guy. Did “precision” exist in the Zulu language prior to European contact? “Oh,” he said, “that’s a very Eurocentric question!” and simply wouldn’t answer. I rang again, spoke to another white guy, and got a virtually identical response.



Kikuyu women do not need dictionaries. So I called the University of South Africa, a large correspondence university in Pretoria, and spoke to a young black guy. As has so often been my experience in Africa, we hit it off from the start. He understood my interest in Zulu and found my questions of great interest. He explained that the Zulu word for “precision” means “to make like a straight line.” Was this part of indigenous Zulu? No; this was added by the compilers of the dictionary.

But, he assured me, it was otherwise for “promise.” I was skeptical. How about “obligation?” We both had the same dictionary (English-Zulu, Zulu-English Dictionary, published by Witwatersrand University Press in 1958), and looked it up. The Zulu entry means “as if to bind one’s feet.” He said that was not indigenous but was added by the compilers. But if Zulu didn’t have the concept of obligation, how could it have the concept of a promise, since a promise is simply the oral undertaking of an obligation? I was interested in this, I said, because Africans often failed to keep promises and never apologized—as if this didn’t warrant an apology.

A light bulb seemed to go on in his mind. Yes, he said; in fact, the Zulu word for promise—isithembiso—is not the correct word. When a black person “promises” he means “maybe I will and maybe I won’t.” But, I said, this makes nonsense of promising, the very purpose of which is to bind one to a course of action. When one is not sure he can do something he may say, “I will try but I can’t promise.” He said he’d heard whites say that and had never understood it till now. As a young Romanian friend so aptly

summed it up, when a black person “promises” he means “I’ll try.”

The failure to keep promises is therefore not a language problem. It is hard to believe that after living with whites for so long they would not learn the correct meaning, and it is too much of a coincidence that the same phenomenon is found in Nigeria, Kenya and Papua New Guinea, where I have also lived. It is much more likely that Africans generally lack the very concept and hence cannot give the word its correct meaning. This would seem to indicate some difference in intellectual capacity.

Note the Zulu entry for obligation: “as if to bind one’s feet.” An obligation binds you, but it does so morally, not physically. It is an abstract concept, which is why there is no word for it in Zulu. So what did the authors of the dictionary do? They took this abstract concept and made it concrete. Feet, rope, and tying are all tangible and observable, and therefore things all blacks will understand, whereas many will not understand what an obligation is. The fact that they had to define it in this way is, by itself, compelling evidence for my conclusion that Zulu thought has few abstract concepts and indirect evidence for the view that Africans may be deficient in abstract thinking.

Abstract thinking

Abstract entities do not exist in space or time; they are typically intangible and can’t be perceived by the senses. They are often things that do not exist. “What would happen if everyone threw rubbish everywhere?” refers to something we hope will not happen, but we can still think about it.



everything we observe with our senses occurs in time and everything we see exists in space; yet we can perceive neither time nor space with our senses, but only with the mind. Precision is also abstract; while we can see and touch things made with precision,

precision itself can only be perceived by the mind.

How do we acquire abstract concepts? Is it enough to make things with precision in order to have the concept of precision? Africans make excellent carvings, made with precision, so why isn't the concept in their language? To have this concept we must not only do things with precision but must be aware of this phenomenon and then give it a name.

How, for example, do we acquire such concepts as belief and doubt? We all have beliefs; even animals do. When a dog wags its tail on hearing his master's footsteps, it believes he is coming. But it has no concept of belief because it has no awareness that it has this belief and so no awareness of belief per se. In short, it has no self-consciousness, and thus is not aware of its own mental states.

It has long seemed to me that blacks tend to lack self-awareness. If such awareness is necessary for developing abstract concepts it is not surprising that African languages have so few abstract terms. A lack of self-awareness—or introspection—has advantages. In my experience neurotic behavior, characterized by excessive and unhealthy self-consciousness, is uncommon among blacks. I am also confident that sexual dysfunction, which is characterized by excessive self-consciousness, is less common among blacks than whites.

Time is another abstract concept with which Africans seem to have difficulties. I began to wonder about this in 1998. Several Africans drove up in a car and parked right in front of mine, blocking it. "Hey," I said, "you can't park here." "Oh, are you about to leave?" they asked in a perfectly polite and friendly way. "No," I said, "but I might later. Park over there"—and they did.

While the possibility that I might want to leave later was obvious to me, their thinking seemed to encompass only the here and now: "If you're leaving right now we understand, but otherwise, what's the problem?" I had other such encounters and the key question always seemed to be, "Are you leaving now?" The future, after all, does not exist. It will exist, but doesn't exist now. People who have difficulty thinking of things that do not exist will ipso facto have difficulty thinking about the future.

It appears that the Zulu word for "future"—isikhathi—is the same as the word for time, as well as for space. Realistically, this means that these concepts probably do not exist in Zulu thought. It also appears that there is no word for the past—meaning, the time preceding the present. The past did exist, but no longer exists. Hence, people who may have problems thinking of things that do not exist will have trouble thinking of the past as well as the future.

This has an obvious bearing on such sentiments as gratitude and loyalty, which I have long noticed are uncommon among Africans. We feel gratitude for things that happened in the past, but for those with little sense of the past such feelings are less likely to arise.

Why did it take me more than 20 years to notice all of this? I think it is because our assumptions about time are so deeply rooted that we are not even aware of making them and hence the possibility that others may not share them simply does not occur to us. And so we don't see it, even when the evidence is staring us in the face.

Mathematics and maintenance

I quote from an article in the South African press about the problems blacks have with mathematics:

"[Xhosa] is a language where polygon and plane have the same definition ... where concepts like triangle, quadrilateral, pentagon, hexagon are defined by only one word." ("Finding New Languages for Maths and Science," Star [Johannesburg], July 24, 2002, p. 8.)



Apartheid-era sign post. More accurately, these concepts simply do not exist in Xhosa, which, along with Zulu, is one of the two most widely spoken languages in South Africa. In America, blacks are said to have a “tendency to approximate space, numbers and time instead of aiming for complete accuracy.” (Star, June 8, 1988, p.10.) In other words, they are also poor at math. Notice the identical triumvirate—space, numbers, and time. Is it just a coincidence that these three highly abstract concepts are the ones with which blacks — everywhere — seem to have such difficulties?

The entry in the Zulu dictionary for “number,” by the way — ningi — means “numerous,” which is not at all the same as the concept of number. It is clear, therefore, that there is no concept of number in Zulu.

White rule in South Africa ended in 1994. It was about ten years later that power outages began, which eventually reached crisis proportions. The principle reason for this is simply lack of maintenance on the generating equipment. Maintenance is future-oriented, and the Zulu entry in the dictionary for it is ondla, which means: “1. Nourish, rear; bring up; 2. Keep an eye on; watch (your crop).” In short, there is no such thing as maintenance in Zulu thought, and it would be hard to argue that this is wholly unrelated to the fact that when people throughout Africa say “nothing works,” it is only an exaggeration.

The New York Times reports that New York City is considering a plan (since implemented) aimed at getting blacks to “do well on standardized tests and to show up for class,” by paying them to do these things and that could “earn [them] as much as \$500 a year.” Students would get money for regular school attendance, every book they read, doing well on tests, and sometimes just for taking them. Parents would be paid for “keeping a full-time job ... having health insurance ... and attending parent-teacher conferences.” (Jennifer Medina, “Schools Plan to Pay Cash for Marks,” New York Times, June 19, 2007.)

The clear implication is that blacks are not very motivated. Motivation involves thinking about the future and hence about things that

do not exist. Given black deficiencies in this regard, it is not surprising that they would be lacking in motivation, and having to prod them in this way is further evidence for such a deficiency.

The Zulu entry for “motivate” is banga, under which we find “1. Make, cause, produce something unpleasant; ... to cause trouble 2. Contend over a claim; ... fight over inheritance; ... 3. Make for, aim at, journey towards” Yet when I ask Africans what banga means, they have no idea. In fact, no Zulu word could refer to motivation for the simple reason that there is no such concept in Zulu; and if there is no such concept there cannot be a word for it. This helps explain the need to pay blacks to behave as if they were motivated.



Zulus. The same New York Times article quotes Darwin Davis of the Urban League as “caution[ing] that the ... money being offered [for attending class] was relatively paltry ... and wondering ... how many tests students would need to pass to buy the latest video game.”

Instead of being shamed by the very need for such a plan, this black activist complains that the payments aren’t enough! If he really is unaware how his remarks will strike most readers, he is morally obtuse, but his views may reflect a common understanding among blacks of what morality is: not something internalized but something others enforce from the outside. Hence his complaint that paying children to do things they should be motivated to do on their own is that they are not being paid enough.

In this context, I recall some remarkable discoveries by the late American linguist, William Stewart, who spent many years in Senegal studying local languages. Whereas Western cultures internalize norms—“Don’t do that!” for a child, eventually becomes “I mustn’t do that” for an adult—African cultures do not. They rely entirely on external controls on behavior from tribal elders and other sources of authority. When Africans were detribalized, these external constraints disappeared, and since there never were internal constraints, the results were crime, drugs, promiscuity, etc. Where there have been other forms of control—as in white-ruled South Africa, colonial Africa, or the segregated American South—this behavior was kept within tolerable limits. But when even these controls disappear there is often unbridled violence.

Stewart apparently never asked why African cultures did not internalize norms, that is, why they never developed moral consciousness, but it is unlikely that this was just a historical accident. More likely, it was the result of deficiencies in abstract thinking ability.



Public service message, South Africa. One explanation for this lack of abstract thinking, including the diminished understanding of time, is that Africans evolved in a climate where they could live day to day without having to think ahead. They never developed this ability because they had no need for it. Whites, on the other hand, evolved under circumstances in which they had to consider what would happen if they didn't build stout houses and store enough fuel and food for the winter. For them it was sink or swim.

Surprising confirmation of Stewart's ideas can be found in the May/June 2006 issue of the *Boston Review*, a typically liberal publication. In "Do the Right Thing: Cognitive Science's Search for a Common Morality," Rebecca Saxe distinguishes between "conventional" and "moral" rules. Conventional rules are supported by authorities but can be changed; moral rules, on the other hand, are not based on conventional authority and are not subject to change. "Even three-year-old children ... distinguish between moral and conventional transgressions," she writes. The only exception, according to James Blair of the National Institutes of Health, are psychopaths, who exhibit "persistent aggressive behavior." For them, all rules are based only on external authority, in whose absence "anything is permissible." The conclusion drawn from this is that "healthy individuals in all cultures respect the distinction between conventional ... and moral [rules]."

However, in the same article, another anthropologist argues that "the special status of moral rules cannot be part of human nature, but is ... just ... an artifact of Western values." Anita Jacobson-Widding, writing of her experiences among the Manyika of Zimbabwe, says:

"I tried to find a word that would correspond to the English concept of 'morality.' I explained what I meant by asking my informants to describe the norms for good behavior toward other people. The answer was unanimous. The word for this was *tsika*. But when I asked my bilingual informants to translate *tsika* into English, they said that it was 'good manners' ..."



An all-too-common problem. She concluded that because good manners are clearly conventional rather than moral rules, the Manyika simply did not have a concept of morality. But how would one explain this absence? Miss Jacobson-Widding's explanation is the typical nonsense that could come only from a so-called intellectual: "the concept of morality does not exist." The far more likely explanation is that the concept of morality, while otherwise universal, is enfeebled in cultures that have a deficiency in abstract thinking.

According to now-discredited folk wisdom, blacks are "children in adult bodies," but there may be some foundation to this view. The average African adult has the raw IQ score of the average 11-year-old white child. This is about the age at which white children begin to internalize morality and no longer need such strong external enforcers.

Gruesome cruelty

Another aspect of African behavior that liberals do their best to ignore but that nevertheless requires an explanation is gratuitous cruelty. A reviewer of *Driving South*, a 1993 book by David Robbins, writes:



Victim of Rwandan violence.

"A Cape social worker sees elements that revel in violence ... It's like a cult which has embraced a lot of people who otherwise appear normal. ... At the slightest provocation their blood-lust is aroused. And then they want to see death, and they jeer and mock at the suffering involved, especially the suffering of a slow and agonizing death." (Citizen[Johannesburg], July 12, 1993, p.6.)

There is something so unspeakably vile about this, something so beyond depravity, that the human brain recoils. This is not merely the absence of human empathy, but the positive enjoyment of human suffering, all the more so when it is “slow and agonizing.” Can you imagine jeering at and mocking someone in such horrible agony?

During the apartheid era, black activists used to kill traitors and enemies by “necklacing” them. An old tire was put around the victim’s neck, filled with gasoline, and—but it is best to let an eye-witness describe what happened next:

“The petrol-filled tyre is jammed on your shoulders and a lighter is placed within reach . . . Your fingers are broken, needles are pushed up your nose and you are tortured until you put the lighter to the petrol yourself.” (Citizen; “SA’s New Nazis,” August 10, 1993, p.18.)

The author of an article in the Chicago Tribune, describing the equally gruesome way the Hutu killed Tutsi in the Burundi massacres, marveled at “the ecstasy of killing, the lust for blood; this is the most horrible thought. It’s beyond my reach.” (“Hutu Killers Danced In Blood Of Victims, Videotapes Show,” Chicago Tribune, September 14, 1995, p.8.) The lack of any moral sense is further evidenced by their having videotaped their crimes, “apparently want[ing] to record . . . [them] for posterity.” Unlike Nazi war criminals, who hid their deeds, these people apparently took pride in their work.



Where Amy Biehl was killed. In 1993, Amy Biehl, a 26-year-old American on a Fulbright scholarship, was living in South Africa, where she spent most of her time in black townships helping blacks. One day when she was driving three African friends home, young blacks stopped the car, dragged her out, and killed her because she was white. A retired senior South African judge, Rex van Schalkwyk, in his 1998 book *One Miracle is Not Enough*, quotes from a newspaper report on the trial of her killers: “Supporters of the three men accused of murdering [her] . . . burst out laughing in the public gallery of the Supreme Court today when a witness told how the battered woman groaned in pain.” This behavior, Van Schalkwyk wrote, “is impossible to explain in terms accessible to rational minds.” (pp. 188-89.)

These incidents and the responses they evoke—“the human brain recoils,” “beyond my reach,” “impossible to explain to rational minds” — represent a pattern of behavior and thinking that cannot be wished away, and offer additional support for my claim that Africans are deficient in moral consciousness.

I have long suspected that the idea of rape is not the same in Africa as elsewhere, and now I find confirmation of this in *Newsweek*:

“According to a three-year study [in Johannesburg] . . . more than half of the young people interviewed — both male and female — believe that forcing sex with someone you know does not constitute sexual violence . . . [T]he casual manner in which South African teens discuss coercive relationships and unprotected sex is staggering.” (Tom Masland, “Breaking The Silence,” *Newsweek*, July 9, 2000.)

Clearly, many blacks do not think rape is anything to be ashamed of.

The Newsweek author is puzzled by widespread behavior that is known to lead to AIDS, asking “Why has the safe-sex effort failed so abjectly?” Well, aside from their profoundly different attitudes towards sex and violence and their heightened libido, a major factor could be their diminished concept of time and reduced ability to think ahead.



Liberian billboard Nevertheless, I was still surprised by what I found in the Zulu dictionary. The main entry for rape reads: “1. Act hurriedly; ... 2. Be greedy. 3. Rob, plunder, ... take [possessions] by force.” While these entries may be related to our concept of rape, there is one small problem: there is no reference to sexual intercourse! In a male-dominated culture, where saying “no” is often not an option (as confirmed by the study just mentioned), “taking sex by force” is not really part of the African mental calculus. Rape clearly has a moral dimension, but perhaps not to Africans. To the extent they do not consider coerced sex to be wrong, then, by our conception, they cannot consider it rape because rape is wrong. If such behavior isn’t wrong it isn’t rape.

An article about gang rape in the left-wing British paper, the Guardian, confirms this when it quotes a young black woman: “The thing is, they [black men] don’t see it as rape, as us being forced. They just see it as pleasure for them.” (Rose George, “They Don’t See it as Rape. They Just See it as Pleasure for Them,” June 5, 2004.) A similar attitude seems to be shared among some American blacks who casually refer to gang rape as “running a train.” (Nathan McCall, *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, Vintage Books, 1995.)

If the African understanding of rape is far afield, so may be their idea of romance or love. I recently watched a South African television program about having sex for money. Of the several women in the audience who spoke up, not a single one questioned the morality of this behavior. Indeed, one plaintively asked, “Why else would I have sex with a man?”

From the casual way in which Africans throw around the word “love,” I suspect their understanding of it is, at best, childish. I suspect the notion is alien to Africans, and I would be surprised if things are very different among American blacks. Africans hear whites speak of “love” and try to give it a meaning from within their own conceptual repertoire. The result is a child’s conception of this deepest of human emotions, probably similar to their misunderstanding of the nature of a promise.

I recently located a document that was dictated to me by a young African woman in June 1993. She called it her “story,” and the final paragraph is a poignant illustration of what to Europeans would seem to be a limited understanding of love:

“On my way from school, I met a boy. And he proposed me. His name was Mokone. He tell me that he love me. And then I tell him I will give him his answer next week. At night I was crazy about him. I was always thinking about him.”

Moral blindness

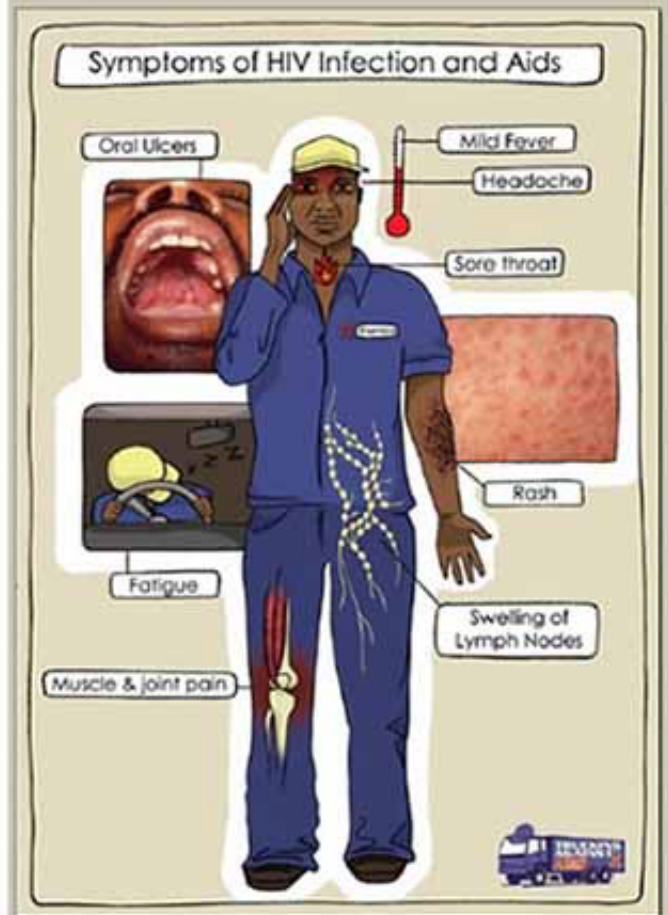
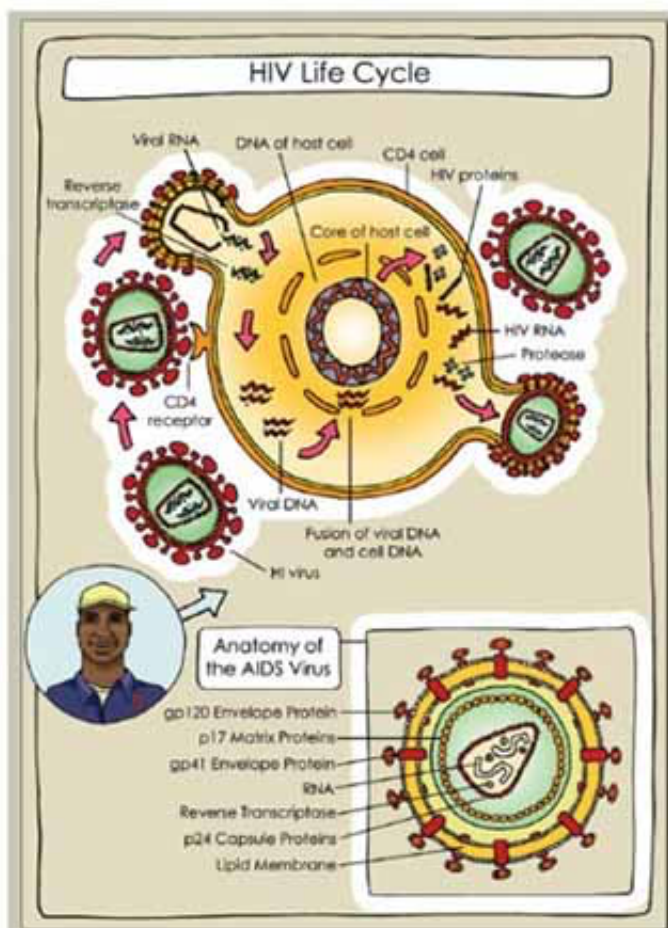
Whenever I taught ethics I used the example of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French Army who was convicted of treason in 1894 even though the authorities knew he was innocent. Admitting their mistake, it was said, would have a disastrous effect on military morale and would cause great social unrest. I would in turn argue that certain things are intrinsically wrong and not just because of their consequences. Even if the results of freeing Dreyfus would be much worse than keeping him in prison, he must be freed, because it is unjust to keep an innocent man in prison.

To my amazement, an entire class in Kenya said without hesitation that he should not be freed. Call me dense if you want, but it was 20 years before the full significance of this began to dawn on me.



Death is certain but accidents are not. Africans, I believe, may generally lack the concepts of subjunctivity and counterfactuality. Subjunctivity is conveyed in such statements as, "What would you have done if I hadn't showed up?" This is contrary to fact because I did show up, and it is now impossible for me not to have shown up. We are asking someone to imagine what he would have done if something that didn't happen (and now couldn't happen) had happened. This requires self-consciousness, and I have already described blacks' possible deficiency in this respect. It is obvious that animals, for example, cannot think counterfactually, because of their complete lack of self-awareness.

When someone I know tried to persuade his African workers to contribute to a health insurance policy, they asked "What's it for?" "Well, if you have an accident, it would pay for the hospital." Their response was immediate: "But boss, we didn't have an accident!" "Yes, but what if you did?" Reply? "We didn't have an accident!" End of story.



South African AIDS education poster. Interestingly, blacks do plan for funerals, for although an accident is only a risk, death is a certainty. (The Zulu entries for "risk" are "danger" and "a slippery surface.") Given the frequent all-or-nothing nature of black

thinking, if it's not certain you will have an accident, then you will not have an accident. Furthermore, death is concrete and observable: We see people grow old and die. Africans tend to be aware of time when it is manifested in the concrete and observable.

One of the pivotal ideas underpinning morality is the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. "How would you feel if someone stole everything you owned? Well, that's how he would feel if you robbed him." The subjunctivity here is obvious. But if Africans may generally lack this concept, they will have difficulty in understanding the Golden Rule and, to that extent, in understanding morality.

If this is true we might also expect their capacity for human empathy to be diminished, and this is suggested in the examples cited above. After all, how do we empathize? When we hear about things like "necklacing" we instinctively — and unconsciously — think: "How would I feel if I were that person?" Of course I am not and cannot be that person, but to imagine being that person gives us valuable moral "information:" that we wouldn't want this to happen to us and so we shouldn't want it to happen to others. To the extent people are deficient in such abstract thinking, they will be deficient in moral understanding and hence in human empathy—which is what we tend to find in Africans.

In his 1990 book *Devil's Night*, Ze'ev Chafets quotes a black woman speaking about the problems of Detroit: "I know some people won't like this, but whenever you get a whole lot of black people, you're gonna have problems. Blacks are ignorant and rude." (pp. 76-77.)

If some Africans cannot clearly imagine what their own rude behavior feels like to others—in other words, if they cannot put themselves in the other person's shoes—they will be incapable of understanding what rudeness is. For them, what we call rude may be normal and therefore, from their perspective, not really rude. Africans may therefore not be offended by behavior we would consider rude — not keeping appointments, for example. One might even conjecture that African cruelty is not the same as white cruelty, since Africans may not be fully aware of the nature of their behavior, whereas such awareness is an essential part of "real" cruelty.

I am hardly the only one to notice this obliviousness to others that sometimes characterizes black behavior. Walt Harrington, a white liberal married to a light-skinned black, makes some surprising admissions in his 1994 book, *Crossings: A White Man's Journey Into Black America*:

"I notice a small car ... in the distance. Suddenly ... a bag of garbage flies out its window I think, I'll bet they're blacks. Over the years I've noticed more blacks littering than whites. I hate to admit this because it is a prejudice. But as I pass the car, I see that my reflex was correct—[they are blacks].

"[As I pull] into a McDonald's drive-through ... [I see that] the car in front of me had four black in it. Again ... my mind made its unconscious calculation: We'll be sitting here forever while these people decide what to order. I literally shook my head My God, my kids are half black! But then the kicker: we waited and waited and waited. Each of the four ... leaned out the window and ordered individually. The order was changed several times. We sat and sat, and I again shook my head, this time at the conundrum that is race in America.

"I knew that the buried sentiment that had made me predict this disorganization ... was ... racist. ... But my prediction was right." (pp. 234-35.)

Africans also tend to litter. To understand this we must ask why whites don't litter, at least not as much. We ask ourselves: "What would happen if everyone threw rubbish everywhere? It would be a mess. So you shouldn't do it!" Blacks' possible deficiency in abstract thinking makes such reasoning more difficult, so any behavior requiring such thinking is less likely to develop in their cultures. Even after living for generations in societies where such thinking is commonplace, many may still fail to absorb it.



A trash pile in Sudan. It should go without saying that my observations about Africans are generalizations. I am not saying that none has the capacity for abstract thought or moral understanding. I am speaking of tendencies and averages, which leave room for many exceptions.

To what extent do my observations about Africans apply to American blacks? American blacks have an average IQ of 85, which is a full 15 points higher than the African average of 70. The capacity for abstract thought is unquestionably correlated with intelligence, and so we can expect American blacks generally to exceed Africans in these respects.

Still, American blacks show many of the traits so striking among Africans: low mathematical ability, diminished abstract reasoning, high crime rates, a short time-horizon, rudeness, littering, etc. If I had lived only among American blacks and not among Africans, I might never have reached the conclusions I have, but the more extreme behavior among Africans makes it easier to perceive the same tendencies among American blacks.

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